



# *The Political Economy of Land Acquisition and Redistribution in Zimbabwe, 1990–1999*

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(SARIPS, Harare)

*This article analyses the socio-economic and political implications of land acquisition in Zimbabwe in the 1990s generally, and particularly in 1997 when the government identified 1,471 farms for potential acquisition and redistribution to black smallholder farmers. The efforts to acquire land for redistribution occurred in the context of growing research interest in comparing land reform across southern Africa, despite the different historical experiences. The Zimbabwean case has been cast as an attempt to pursue a radical state-led approach to land redistribution through compulsory land acquisition, or as a failed bureaucratic and 'non-transparent' effort. In contrast, the South African experience came to be held up as a more democratic, transparent, community driven and less costly 'market assisted' approach. Stereotypes in the literature on land reform in southern Africa influence the process of resolving the land question. While the dominant trend seems to be an acceptance of market prescription from the donor community, the Zimbabwean state, in particular, has intervened in the so-called land market in a more radical way. Attempts to acquire land in 1997, six years after the formal adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme, led the international community to believe that land reform was being used as a strategy to bolster an 'unpopular' regime. The overall conclusion of the article is that the dominant fear that state-led land reform will bring economic collapse is unfounded, given the social and political implications of a failure to address the land question.*

## **Introduction: Land Acquisition for Redistribution in Zimbabwe**

The attempt to acquire 1,471 farms for redistribution to smallholder farmers in the 'Year of Our Lord 1997', as President Robert Mugabe put it,<sup>1</sup> forms the focus of this article. The state had already transferred over 3.5 million hectares to some 70,000 families. In

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Herald*, 27 November 1997; *BBC World News*, 12 January 1998, on a speech by the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, announcing the intention to acquire land for redistribution.

retrospect, the question that lingers is whether this bid for land acquisition signified a final resolve to tackle the land question once and for all.<sup>2</sup> This article attempts to evaluate the process of land acquisition using the government's own criteria for land identification, as enshrined in the Land Acquisition Act of 1992.<sup>3</sup> The analysis is based on the initial 1,471 farms identified in 1997.<sup>4</sup> I first consider the background and context to the land question, before turning to a detailed discussion of the conceptualization of the land problem in Zimbabwe. In the analysis of farms listed for acquisition I look at the perceived economic and social impacts of acquisition. The last section addresses the policy negotiation process, before drawing conclusions regarding the way forward for land reform policy-making.

Over six million indigenous black people live in Zimbabwe's marginal rural lands, the communal areas. These areas have poor soils and unreliable rainfall; producers lack control of water rights and are excluded from the bulk of the nations' natural resources. The unequal distribution of resources means that 4,500 mainly white, large-scale farmers dominate Zimbabwe's predominantly agrarian economy.<sup>5</sup> Together with transnational capital, white agrarian interests control key sectors such as tourism, forestry, commodity exports and the narrow agro-industrial sector underlying the urban political economy. These imbalances dramatically skew income distribution in Zimbabwe, reflecting an unchanged legacy of colonial rule. In spite of the liberation war, a narrow racial and class monopoly over land has been consolidated through extra market processes for decades.

This economic structure restricts rural incomes and the expansion of domestic Zimbabwean markets: over 60 per cent of rural people are poor and cannot afford basic health and educational services.<sup>6</sup> Zimbabwe's human capital is thus constrained by an inefficient economic structure, which under-employs its people and degrades their quality of life. The growth of poverty, unemployment and income disparities in the face of the under-use of substantial parts of Zimbabwe's land and natural resources (despite the continued significant growth in commercial agricultural production and tourism) is the main factor that fuels today's land question. While historical grievances over land alienation remain important, these tend to be subordinated to the more general demand for the redistribution of land for productive uses by a variety of potential and actual small and large-scale black land users. In the media, the most visible demands for land are those of black elites, not communal area farmers.

However, the demand by the 'indigenous elite'<sup>7</sup> for large-scale farms is not a primary factor in land policy formulation because the economic rationality of this focus is considered questionable. The key objective of government land reform policy is to establish a more efficient and rational structure of farming and of land and natural resource use. The key issue facing Zimbabwe's land reform policy is how to balance control of and access to land, by redistributing land from large-scale landholders who underuse their land to new small and medium-scale users. The challenge is to find a way to 'peacefully transfer'<sup>8</sup> land

2 The government has made several policy statements on land acquisition which have not been matched by practical implementation since the 1980s. See S. Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe* (Harare, 1995) and L. Tshuma, *A Matter of (In)Justice: The State, Law and Agrarian Question in Zimbabwe* (Harare, 1997).

3 Government of Zimbabwe, *Land Acquisition Act* (Harare, 1992).

4 The actual number of farms identified for acquisition has changed as discussed below.

5 S. Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe – 1997/8: Socio-Economic and Political Impacts* (Harare, 1998).

6 Government of Zimbabwe, *Poverty Assessment Study* (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Harare, 1995).

7 The term 'indigenous' in Zimbabwe generally refers to black Africans born in Zimbabwe. It thus differs from the usual use of the term to mean, e.g. aborigines or Khoisan. It also excludes whites born in Zimbabwe as they are regarded as descendants of illegal settlers who gained land through conquest.

8 See my review of the US congress foreign policy debate on Zimbabwe in *The Land Question*, and S. Moyo, 'The Land Acquisition Experiences in Southern Africa', in S. Moyo and D. Tevera (eds), *Environmental Security in Southern Africa* (Harare, 1999).

away from those who have been and remain unwilling and incapable of mobilizing adequate financial and labour resources towards the optimal use of land and natural resources at their command.

## **Land Reform Debates and Strategies in Southern Africa**

The objective of this analysis is to evaluate systematically the political economy of Zimbabwe's emerging land policy. I assess the government's consistency in addressing the land question through an empirical evaluation of the outcome of its efforts to identify land to be acquired compulsorily in the 1990s. First an assessment of the 1980s is given to set a context for the land reform process in the 1990s. The criteria used to evaluate the policy are those which the government used to identify the 1,471 listed farms: land under-use (including derelict land), multiple farm ownership, farmer absenteeism, contiguity to communal areas and oversized farms in terms of their agro-ecological potential. I examine the socio-economic implications of redistributing the land that was gazetted for acquisition by assessing its quality, use and economic role, the extent of multiple farm ownership, and the social features of the identified farms.

During the 1980s, land reform in Zimbabwe focused on restitution for past land alienation, promoting equity in land property rights in order to attain political stability, and promoting economic efficiency through reducing the size of land holdings for more efficient use by non-absentee, and socially diverse land owners. Land reform in the 1980s was defined in the context of promoting national self-sufficiency, focusing upon import substitution industrialization and agricultural development strategies led by state interventions in 'land related markets'. Land reform was intended to enhance labour intensive small farmer production so as to optimize land productivity, returns to capital invested, the self provision of food and basic needs, and to encourage a less skewed income distribution.<sup>9</sup> This approach promised positive macro-economic benefits including 'growth with equity', political reconciliation in a racially polarized society, and more broadly based participation in the economy. Land policy thus sought the efficient use of scarce and abundant national resources, while promoting food security and household self-reliance. Few of these goals were met.

Those involved in southern African debates on land reform tend to be hostile to large-scale land redistribution because of the specific settler-colonial and racial influences on the land discourse. Dominant conceptual frameworks that evolved from settler-colonial ideology and which now thrive in South Africa, are based upon three myths: first, that the land rights held by white minorities over the land they expropriated enjoys social and political legitimacy; second, that the large-scale farms owned by whites are efficiently used both in terms of the scale of area used and yields per unit of land; and third, that freehold tenure and existing private land markets are effective and absolutely superior to other forms of tenure such as leasehold and customary (so-called communal) tenure. Debates on land reform based upon redistributing land are relatively new: the decolonization of the main settler colonies is barely two decades old; Angola and Mozambique have had 23 years of post-colonial experience, but have been much disrupted by civil wars. Zimbabwe earnestly began implementing land reform around 1982, followed by Namibia which began implementation some six years ago and South Africa which began only three years ago.

The history of locally-organized pressure for land redistribution by 'civil society' groups such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) is less than ten years old in most of southern Africa. Only in South Africa did the

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<sup>9</sup> See discussion in Moyro, *The Land Question*.

National Land Committee emerge in the late 1970s and 1980s as part of a mass movement. In most countries, nationalist liberation movements not 'civil society' mobilized pressure for land redistribution as part of their demands for independence. Illegal land occupations have been a sporadic albeit influential force in keeping land redistribution on the agenda. There is little documentation of the experience of mobilizing pressure for land reform in most countries of the region.<sup>10</sup> Southern African land reform debates remain constricted by simplistic analyses of the origin, nature, and influence of the social forces that have organized political pressure for land reform.<sup>11</sup> The real basis of either state-led or community-led land reform initiatives is little understood because of the inability of most studies to deal with the illegal and underground aspects of mobilizing for reform.<sup>12</sup>

To date, land policy in southern Africa has not fully taken on board mainstream agricultural economics debates. These have demonstrated through global case evidence that smaller-sized farms tend to use their land more productively, in terms of higher unit yields and the use of labour.<sup>13</sup> This has been the case because of the self-supervision of labour by peasant households which exploit particularly female and child labour. The recent exposure of governments and settlers to impressive small farmer performance in Malawi and Zimbabwe has only gradually changed beliefs about smallholder efficiency and competitiveness,<sup>14</sup> and this despite the abundant historical evidence.<sup>15</sup> The belief in the greater efficiency of large farms has also been a key constraint to progressive land policy in non-settler states before and after independence. Various governments, including those of Malawi, Swaziland and Botswana, developed their agricultural and land policies from the late 1960s on the basis of promoting large estates because of the need for economies of scale and the presumed superiority of large farms.<sup>16</sup>

Such land policies initially encouraged land alienation in favour of foreign agribusiness and parastatal estates. Later in the 1980s, land policies in southern Africa promoted individual indigenous capitalist farmers, drawn from senior politicians and civil servants, retirees and other formerly non-agrarian indigenous business people.<sup>17</sup> Once again macro-economic and agricultural policy regimes ensured that various resources such as credit, foreign currency and infrastructure were mainly allocated to both white and indigenous large capitalist farmers. The effects of such preferential resource allocations were wrongly taken to imply that large-scale farming was more effective than smallholder farming in

10 Various authors such as T. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe* (London, 1985); N. Kriger, 'The Zimbabwean War of Liberation: Struggle within the Struggle', *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 2, 1 (1992); Moyo, *The Land Question*; R. L. Abel, *Politics by Other Means: Law in the Struggle Against Apartheid, 1980-1994* (New York and London, 1995), cite the lack of research on this topic.

11 For instance, see my *Land and Democracy in Zimbabwe* (SAPES Monographs Series No. 7, 1999) and J. Van Zyl, J. Kirsten and H. P. Binswanger (eds), *Agricultural Land Reform in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1996).

12 Moyo, *The Land Question*; Sam Moyo, *The Impact of Structural Adjustment on Land Uses in Zimbabwe* (Uppsala, forthcoming).

13 This issue is explored in detail in W. A. Master, *Government and Agriculture* (London, 1994); S. Moyo, 'Land Reform Experiences in Southern Africa', in S. Moyo and D. Tevera (eds), *Environmental Security in Southern Africa* (Harare, 1999).

14 D. Weiner, S. Moyo, B. Munslow and P. O'Keefe, 'Land Use and Agricultural Productivity in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 23, 2 (1985); S. Moyo, 'The Land Question in Zimbabwe', in I. Mandaza (ed), *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition* (Dakar, 1987).

15 Moyo, *The Land Question*.

16 P. von Blackenburg, *Large Commercial Farmers and Land Reform in Africa* (London, 1994); L. Cliffe, 'Zimbabwe's Agricultural Success and Food Security', *Review of African Political Economy*, 43 (1988); Moyo, 'Land Reform Experiences in Southern Africa'; T. Mkandawire, 'The State and Agriculture in Africa: Introductory Remarks', in T. Mkandawire and N. Bourenane (eds), *The State and Agriculture in Africa* (London, 1987), all discuss the problems with the notion of large farms as more efficient than small holdings.

17 T. Mkandawire, 'Fiscal Structure, State Contraction and Political Responses in Africa', in T. Mkandawire and A. Olukoshi (eds), *Between Liberalisation and Oppression: The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Africa* (Dakar, 1995).

southern Africa. This had the effect of legitimizing the expansion of large-scale land holdings and discouraging land reform in those countries where growing land ownership imbalances were exacerbating land shortages, land degradation and rural poverty.

But the major constraint on the evolution of land redistribution programmes in the post-colonial and post-apartheid era of the 1990s was the emergence and dominance of neo-liberal, monetarist macro-economic and trade investment policies, as well as export-oriented sectoral policies in agriculture and land.<sup>18</sup> Free market policy perspectives reinforced the biases against nationalization or compulsory acquisition of land in southern Africa<sup>19</sup> and promoted the current focus on market-based approaches to land reform. The Zimbabwean willing-buyer/willing-seller approach that was enshrined in the Lancaster House Constitution of 1979 led to costly state-financed market purchases of large farms during the 1990s. This tendency was bolstered by the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) policy prescriptions.<sup>20</sup>

The Zimbabwean experience, which can be considered as a pilot land reform process for southern African during the 1980s, set the stage for the elaboration of similar compromises over land in Namibia and South Africa. Market-assisted land reform or land acquisition processes have become the focus in South Africa. The 1997 White Paper on South African Land Policy indeed accords a greater role to the market or private and community sector than central government, even though it is conceded that the government has had initially to play a leading role in land policy formulation.<sup>21</sup> These land reform policy perspectives have been influenced by theoretical approaches that espouse elitist modernization and a trickle-down development strategy. Land redistribution has not in this narrow sense addressed the need for reform of the region's economies. The fact that asset redistribution can change the structures of the economy and that income redistribution can alter domestic factor markets in a virtuous cycle has been ignored. Thus, instead of reinforcing an internal market-oriented and employment-intensive development strategy, conservative market-focused land reforms have constrained the evolution of more broadly based productive structures during the economic contraction phases of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs).

The call for market-assisted approaches to land acquisition, mainly on grounds of the reduction of the costs faced by governments reeling with budget deficits, is in itself spurious. First, these approaches propose to lumber the beneficiaries of reforms, as opposed to governments, with most of the costs of their establishment on land transferred to them. This includes the hidden costs of in effect 'enriching' elites who have held on to land speculatively, and then negotiated market-based prices for their land directly with the 'beneficiaries' of redistribution. The beneficiaries, it is presumed, will be assisted in paying for land by private stakeholders, despite the private stakeholders' own interests in land and related financial markets. The beneficiaries are also meant to pay for various infrastructures, despite the fact that communities elsewhere may have received such infrastructure through state support. The key stakeholders now interested in this process include large farmers' unions, banks and NGOs.

A populist aspect of the emerging perspectives on land acquisition is that it should be

18 S. Moyo, *Zimbabwe's New Land Reform Debate: ESAP, Land Policy and Land Markets* (Uppsala, forthcoming).

19 See Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe* and my articles in *The Mirror* referred to in the first footnote.

20 World Bank, *Zimbabwe: Agriculture Sector Memorandum*, Vol. 1 and 2, No. 9429-Zim (Washington, DC, 1991); World Bank, *Zimbabwe Achieving Shared Growth: Country Economic Memorandum*, Vol. 2 (Washington, DC, 1995), further argued for this position in the ESAP framework.

21 The South African Land Policy received technical support from the World Bank, and its approach is now being promoted elsewhere in the region. See Van Zyl, Kirsten and Binswanger (eds), *Agricultural Land Reform in South Africa*.

community driven. Communities are expected to develop local land reform plans and to identify the demand for and potential supply and price of land.<sup>22</sup> They should choose the farm models suitable to their situation, and identify the necessary institutional support. Communities are expected to self-select the beneficiaries, to negotiate the purchase of land and, using land purchase grants and private credit, they are expected to buy and use the land.<sup>23</sup> Technical assistance and private sector inputs are considered crucial to sustainability and success in this process. The problem with this perspective is that it presumes that 'negotiated land reform' can be led in a fair way by landowners who negotiate with the impoverished and marginal rural populations of southern Africa. Unlike their Latin American counterparts, who have evolved massive social movements supported by radical NGOs and local political organizations, rural communities in southern Africa remain repressed under traditional chieftaincy and dominant-party political systems. These lack democratic and accountable procedures and are not inclusive. Moreover, the resource bases and capacities of CBOs are so weak that they tend to be led by NGOs, which are themselves dependent on external development agency funding.<sup>24</sup>

The community-driven land reform model thus contains elements of idealism which mask the dominance of private, technocratic elite consultants and NGOs, as evidence from the South African experience has begun to show.<sup>25</sup> The empirical evidence on the class and racial networks underlying this model needs to be queried. Nonetheless, the excessively state-driven model of Zimbabwe has had its own share of problems, including the slow acquisition of costly land and the encroachment of elite interests on the land reform programme. Hence the adoption of an Inception Phase of the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme-2 (LRRP-2) which is intended to balance state and stakeholder approaches to land reform.<sup>26</sup>

A final conceptual issue of concern in examining land reform approaches is the distinction that is emerging from empirical evidence regarding the relative merits of land rights-based approaches to land transfers as opposed to land redistribution approaches. The latter is based upon the identification of generalized demands for land for survival, agricultural growth and rural development. The legally sanctioned approaches to the restoration of land rights have been termed the 'land restitution' approach.<sup>27</sup> This requires, as in the South African case, the time-bound consideration of substantiated land claims. Through such claims, particular land rights can be physically or financially restored. Neither Zimbabwe nor Namibia has tried these legally cumbersome approaches. They tend to be controversial because of the time limits set on relevant expropriations and the difficulties in finding evidence adequate to demonstrate loss of rights. This approach tends to be slow, and biased towards historically favoured groups with access to documented and statutory title to land.

Illegal restitution processes called 'squatting' or 'land self-provisioning' are becoming

22 *Ibid.*

23 H. P. Binswanger, 'The Political Implications of Alternative Models of Land Reform and Compensation', in Van Zyl, Kirsten and Binswanger (eds), *Agricultural Land Reform in South Africa*; J. W. Bruce and S. E. Mighot-Adholla (eds), *Searching for Land Tenure Security in Africa* (Dubuque, IA, 1994).

24 I. Cherrett and A. Heidenreich, *Assessment of Environmental NGOs in East and Southern Africa* (London, 1993); S. Moyo, B. Raftopolous and J. Makumbe, *NGOs and Development in Zimbabwe* (Harare, 1999).

25 M. Adams, S. Sibanda and S. Turner, *Land Tenure Reform and Rural Livelihoods in Southern Africa* (ODI Natural Resources Perspective, No. 39, February 1999); M. Adams, *Land Reform: New Seeds on Old Ground?* (ODI Natural Resources Perspectives, No. 6, October 1995).

26 Government of Zimbabwe, 'The Inception Phase Framework Plan of the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme Phase 2', Draft (Harare, 1999).

27 See the annual report of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, *Problems and Obstacles Faced in the Field* (Republic of South Africa, 1997), p. 23, and the affiliate report of the National Land Committee, *Surplus People Project* (Republic of South Africa, 1997), p. 31.

a crucial aspect of the evolution of land reform.<sup>28</sup> Increased land occupations are now influential in Zimbabwe's land redistribution process, and have been observed recently in South Africa, Namibia and Malawi. Alliances between the state and local land self-provisioners, standing in opposition to international forces and narrow, racially-defined landed interests, may become key definers of land reforms. In Zimbabwe, the number of squatters shows signs of increasing with 15 major land invasions in 1997 and 1998 in prime lands. For example, the Svosve people invaded large commercial farms in Mashonaland East and refused to move unless land was made available to them. The invaders even occupied land belonging to or being leased by the state to prominent black political leaders. The question raised was whether government or the communities themselves led these occupations. One recurring explanation was that the state used liberation war veterans to organize popular land invasions, in order to force the hand of the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) and donors to support and finance land transfer.<sup>29</sup> Land occupiers also seemed to be motivated by the desire to press government to act on redistribution.

### Land Acquisition and Reform under ESAP in the 1990s

Land acquisition has been a key problem of land reform in settler economies. Today, market liberalization restricts state intervention in land administration in a context where there are diverse groups with different justifications for claims to land. Southern African liberal ideology and market reforms have eclipsed questions of race and class due to the demise of socialism as an ideology and the emergence of 'reconciliation' politics. Yet the problems of equity and racial bias in capital and markets remain. In Zimbabwe, the ESAP framework has not addressed the key constraints facing small-scale farmers, such as discriminatory land and financial markets, distorted water rights, and lack of access to essential infrastructure for more effective land use. Compulsory land acquisition was not part of the ESAP strategy, nor did ESAP invest in water development as a means of increasing agricultural productivity and rural employment.<sup>30</sup>

The evolution of Zimbabwe's land policy and struggles over land is a product of various policy reforms, including macro-economic policy changes, which changed markets for land, commodity trade and incentives for the supply of agrarian services. Together, these changes affected the value of land and therefore the demand for land. Agricultural policy after independence focused on increasing smallholder participation in markets and diversifying the range and value of agrarian markets. However, the ESAP policy offered no concrete resources to back smallholder export-led growth in commodity production (as had happened in Kenya) due to the restrictive land, water and infrastructural conditions of communal areas. Large-scale farmers, with their long-standing disproportionate access to such resources, responded to ESAP incentives. This influenced changes in Zimbabwe's land use and land tenure tendencies, and consolidated the move towards an increasingly market-oriented conception of Zimbabwe's land question. The ESAP policy influences included

28 See Moyo, *The Impact of Structural Adjustment on Land Uses in Zimbabwe*.

29 See: 'Villagers Descend on Commercial Farms by Force', *The Herald*, 19 June 1998; M. Sayagues, 'Zim Peasants Take Back Land', *Mail and Guardian*, 26 June to 2 July 1998; W. Chuma, 'Svosve Villagers Threaten to Invade Nearby Farms Again', *Daily News*, 28 April 1999; 'Svosve Villagers Remain Defiant', *The Herald*, 29 June 1998; 'Svosve Villagers Return Home', *The Herald*, 30 June 1998; 'Svosve Villagers' Land Grievances Upheld: President Rules Out Use of Force', *The Herald*, 25 June 1998; E. Zindi, 'Villagers Vow there is no Going Back on Land Issue', *The Sunday Mail*, 21 June 1998; R. Imbayago, 'Land Hunger Unleashes Mass Exodus: Svosve Villagers Continue Flooding Commercial Farms', *The Herald*, 20 June 1998.

30 It was only after the 1992 drought that government policy shifted towards building dams in communal areas, increasing small farmers' share of water rights, and encouraging private dam development.

incentives from currency depreciation, agricultural market liberalization, agricultural export market promotion subsidies, trade liberalization benefits on lowered tariffs for imports of inputs and equipment, and labour deregulation. In general, there was a significant shift in the financial and economic values and benefits from export land use, which accrued to various individual and state landholders during the 1990s. As a result of changing land and related market values, land itself became a more hotly contested asset as demands for land from various newly formed indigenous black farmers' interest groups grew. Organizations such as the Smallholder Ostrich Corporation, the Zimbabwe Ostrich Producers' Association, and the Indigenous Commercial Farmers' Union promoted new export land uses and bolstered the demand for land.<sup>31</sup>

The government's land reform policy, as defined by the Land Acquisition Act of 1992 and land transfer targets, could potentially achieve massive redistribution. But the key trend during the 1990s seemed to be a gradual revision of the strategy of compulsorily acquiring under-used land with partial compensation for land improvements, towards a policy of using donor funds to buy willingly offered land. Notable in the government's revised policy proposals of 1996 was the continuation of a bifurcated approach of transferring land to 'better off' black farmers, including medium-scale producers, and to the landless or 'poor but capable' farmers in overcrowded communal areas. Land policy debates from 1980 to the present have also been polarized around forces for and against the full-scale privatization of land on current land tenure regimes. Arguments for private land markets have centred on preserving Large Scale Commercial Farm (LSCF) property rights (i.e. former 'European' farmland) because, since 1991, the LSCF sector has been exposed to the possibility of facing compulsory acquisition by the state. Before 1992, the LSCF land markets were relatively 'free', except in terms of inherited colonial regulations that governed the subdivision and land use conversion of LSCF lands, especially for transfer or sale. These regulations were originally based on technologically and socially static models of the scale of land necessary for commercial viability, and were retained after independence as a means of controlling speculative land sales through subdivision as well as conversions of land use.

Concerns for the indigenization of large-scale farming are also reflected in land policy liberalization, as the question of the racial balance of the LSCF sector (rather than its partitioning into smaller farmlands) took centre stage. The LSCF sector remains 80 per cent white, and these land owners are not socially integrated and are remote from mainstream party politics. The non-Zimbabwean nationality and the physical absence of many of the large land owners, along with the increasing use of stock-holding land tenure arrangements for the control of land, especially in the growing eco-tourist industry, have globalized the interests in Zimbabwe's land question. This has tended to make the negotiated redistribution of land difficult in the post-independence period. The use of a government-led compulsory land acquisition and redistribution approach partly reflects the failure of all interested parties to redress Zimbabwe's land problem.

The pressure to evolve 'efficient' LSCF land markets by relaxing the subdivision and land use conversion regulations increased during the late 1980s. This followed the visible gains from new land uses such as horticulture and tourism, which yielded high profits on smaller land units than were the norm in the LSCF. The demand to enter into these enterprises grew among new black and white land entrepreneurs.<sup>32</sup> The World Bank interestingly provided the most direct impetus to the government's reconsideration of its land subdivision policy after the adoption of ESAP, and in the context of arguing for a

31 Moyo, *The Impact of Structural Adjustment on Land Uses in Zimbabwe*.

32 Details in Moyo, *The Impact of Structural Adjustment on Land Uses in Zimbabwe*.



continued market framework of land redistribution.<sup>33</sup> The official Land Tenure Commission report affirmed this policy stance.<sup>34</sup> I have, however, argued for the combined use of three interventions in the LSCF land markets as a means of achieving efficient land use, effective markets in terms of pricing and transfers, and the deconcentration of land ownership.<sup>35</sup> Compulsory land acquisition at controlled prices, as enabled by the Land Acquisition Act of 1992, would be used to control land values and the transfer process so as to meet wider social demands for land redistribution from white to black rather than merely 'effective demand'. Land taxation and relaxed subdivision procedures, within a framework of compulsory state acquisition and tax incentives, would reward voluntary LSCF efforts to rationalize their land control and use. This has not happened: in practice, the government has relaxed subdivision procedures but delayed the land tax, while at the same time sparing the LSCF sector substantial compulsory land acquisition and retaining its control over communal area transfers, thereby postponing land titling there.

### The Economic Impact of Land Transfer

Three highly problematic frameworks for analysing the costs and benefits of acquiring the 1,471 farms listed in 1997 have been put forward, largely by private sector and media interests. Government officials, most independent policy analysts and donors have remained mute.<sup>36</sup> The first framework is a general political and economic approach that lists a series of agro-economic and political processes expected to follow from the land transfers. The second is a commodity output loss approach (cropped area, volumes and values). This uses questionable quantitative methods. Finally, a macro-economic framework using broad quantitative estimates is proffered, again based upon weak evidence. Most of these assessments tended to be static and to focus on the psychological effects that tampering with property relations may have on markets or investors. Few have assessed the economic, social and political *benefits* that could be realized from the new farmers who would gain access to land. The debate has been resolutely cost-oriented, predicting rising unemployment, reduced Gross Domestic Product (GDP), deteriorating race relations, political and economic instability, white skills emigration and a slow down in indigenous commercial farmer empowerment. Commodity production losses were anticipated in tobacco, cotton, horticulture, sugar and maize. Losses among field crops such as wheat and soyabeans were rarely cited, and there was little expectation of major losses in food production or of increased food imports and thus food aid as a result of land acquisition.<sup>37</sup> These observers feared that loss

33 The report, while acknowledging that LSCF lands were underused, suggested that freeing LSCF land markets by relaxing land subdivision regulations and implementing a land tax could lead to the availability of more land for redistribution and more efficient LSCF land use. See World Bank, *Zimbabwe: Agriculture Sector Memorandum*.

34 Land Tenure Commission, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Land Tenure Systems* (Harare, 1994).

35 S. Moyo, *Economic Nationalism and Land Reform* (Harare, October 1993); Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe*.

36 See P. Chigaru, 'Issues of Land and Poverty Alleviation Cannot be Ignored', *The Financial Gazette*, 24 September 1998; P. Chigaru, 'Confusion Surrounds Govt's Land Designation Exercise: Viability of Agriculture Sector Threatened', *Financial Gazette*, 26 November 1998; E. Bloch in the *Zimbabwe Independent*, 5 December 1997; articles in *The Herald*, 5, 6, 8, 18, 19, 20 and 29 December 1997; articles in *The Sunday Mail*, 21 December 1997.

37 'Farm Designation Upsets Top Tobacco Grower', *The Herald*, 24 December 1997; 'Tobacco Industry Set To Grow Despite Land Issue', *The Sunday Mail*, 18 January 1998; 'ZTA in Plot Against Land Designation?: SA Consultants to be Hired', *The Sunday Mail*, 8 February 1998; 'Land Acquisition 'Anomalies' Worry ZTA', *The Herald*, 5 December 1997; R. Tyson, 'Grounds of Contention: A Land Grab and Extra Taxes are Causing an Up-Roar on the Financial Markets and Streets of Zimbabwe', *Time*, 150, 25 (22 December 1997); A. McCormick, 'Seizing Farms is Economic Suicide', Readers Forum, *The Financial Gazette*, 27 November 1997; 'Land Redistribution Could Lead to a New Revolution in Agriculture', *The Sunday Mail*, 23 November 1997; S. Chamunorwa, 'Land

of export markets would ensue and that the depressed tobacco prices, the dramatic currency devaluations, and the retreat of stock market investment during 1998 were all attributable to the 1997 land gazettings.

Tobacco production was expected to drop by 50 per cent since 700 tobacco farmers' lands were purportedly identified.<sup>38</sup> This commodity accounts for 40 per cent of Zimbabwe's total exports: tobacco production losses from land acquisition were predicted to result in a twenty per cent loss of foreign currency earnings by 1999. Tobacco losses were expected to be so severe because of the specialized skills, ranging from nursing seedlings to varied agronomic, crop-curing and marketing skills, as well as the infrastructure, required to handle the crop. Small farmers were not expected to have such resources or skills. According to the CFU, the value of outputs for cotton, maize and horticulture were all expected to decline by 50 per cent by 1999. These predictions are, however, controversial because small farmers already produce 65 per cent of the national totals for cotton and maize. Moreover, the land area required for horticulture is quite small: producers can easily gain access to sufficient land. There were contradictory reports about whether newly planned investments in sugar production earmarked for the Mazowe–Bindura–Shamva area were suspended because of high interests rates (above 50 per cent) or lack of investor confidence occasioned by the governments' land acquisition policy.<sup>39</sup>

Although some critics expected environmental damage to result from land transfers due to the growth of a phenomenon they call 'subsistence land husbandry',<sup>40</sup> few analysts suggested that wildlife resources or tourist markets would be hurt by land transfers. Presumably this reflects the relative 'success' of the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (Campfire) programme in managing such resources. Perhaps because wildlife could be easily relocated within the LSCF sector and because wildlife can also be produced relatively easily by indigenous commercial and small-scale farmers, losses were rarely cited by critics. It was also suggested by Zimbabwe Tobacco Association (ZTA) economists such as Erich Bloch and Edmore Tobaiwa, that Zimbabwe's GDP would be halved and formal sector employment would decline by at least fifteen per cent due to reductions in agricultural and downstream jobs, while declining exports would lead to further current account deficiencies such that import cover would be reduced to less than one month.<sup>41</sup> By and large the investment climate was expected to worsen due to uncertainty among investors regarding property rights and the declining collateral value of land. In addition, the government's fiscal burden and deficit were expected to rise due to farm purchases, resettlement and extension services.<sup>42</sup>

One key problem with such analyses is their tendency to lump together the sources and

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Footnote 37 continued

Policy Spells Disaster', *Zimbabwe Independent*, 28 November 1997; B. Peta, 'Zim Land Acquisition Contravenes Accord: UK', *Zimbabwe Independent*, 9 January 1998; T. Nyakunu, 'Farm Designation to Cost Foreign Currency', *Zimbabwe Independent*, 9 January 1998; 'Economic Impact of Land Acquisition will be Minimal', *Financial Gazette*, 5 March 1998.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 L. Machipisa, 'Zim Soothes Investors on Land Grab', *Electronic Mail and Guardian*, 14 November 1997; L. Machipisa, 'Land Row Rocks Zimbabwe's Exchange', *Electronic Mail and Guardian*, 8 December 1997; CFU, 'Summary of the Meeting Held at the State House Offices with President on the 26th of November 1997', on [www.cfu.samara.co.zw](http://www.cfu.samara.co.zw); 'Farmers Blast CFU', *Zimbabwe Standard*, 30 November 1997.

41 Edmore Tobaiwa, 'Land Acquisition Should Have Economic Focus', *Financial Gazette*, 2 April 1998.

42 A. McCormick, 'Seizing Farms is Economic Suicide', Readers Forum, *Financial Gazette*, 27 November 1997; E. Tobaiwa, 'Is Land Redistribution the Way Forward?', *Financial Gazette*, 27 November 1997; N. Swanepoel (CFU), *Financial Gazette*, 4 December 1997; P. Deketeke, 'Acquisition of Farms by State', *The Sunday Mail*, 23 November 1997; J. Raath, 'In Zimbabwe, the Dream of Land has Turned into Poverty and Confusion', *Electronic Mail and Guardian*, 28 November 1997; J. Raath, 'The People Don't Even Want Mugabe's Land', *Electronic Mail and Guardian*, 1 December 1997.

effects of the problems that might arise from land acquisition.<sup>43</sup> The varied effects of changes in rainfall, technology and irrigation on commodity production are, for instance, hardly considered. Losses of agricultural output are not entirely novel in Zimbabwe, given that the agricultural sector has regularly to adapt to drought 'shocks'.<sup>44</sup> Only 46 per cent of the 4,500 LSCF farmers (half of whom are in the well-watered Natural Region II)<sup>45</sup> have irrigation facilities with which to stabilize crop production. Some estimates indicate that only 180,000 hectares, or 30 per cent of the cropped area, is irrigated fully, while altogether 46 per cent of the LSCF farms may have access to full and supplementary watering facilities with which to counter rainfall fluctuations.<sup>46</sup> About 30 per cent of the irrigated area is found in the driest Natural Region V among a few multinational commercial holdings. These were not listed for acquisition.<sup>47</sup> Since most crop production in the LSCF is concentrated in irrigated farmlands, and few of these farms were targeted for acquisition, the expected patterns of crop production losses were misplaced.

Another methodological problem which undermines the reliability of the estimations of crop losses is the fact that most such analyses do not consider the effects of on-going land use switching processes among LSCF farmers due to the effects of droughts, markets, or the land acquisition policy. In particular, there is an on-going reduction of LSCF areas devoted to maize and cotton. More LSCF maize is being used on farms for livestock feeds, raising other questions about the efficiency of Zimbabwe's livestock production, especially in terms of allocating land (along with the maize produced on it) to stock in Natural Regions I and II.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore there has been a switch among some LSCF farmers' land use in prime and poorer Natural Regions from commercial beef production to wildlife management.<sup>49</sup> The effects of improved returns to wildlife ranching as opposed to beef ranching, due to the growth of tourism and sport hunting, explain some of the shift away from maize and cotton, and may account for future shifts. The calculations of expected crop losses therefore underplayed an already established trend of land use change in the LSCF sector.

### *Farm Sizes and Production Potential*

To understand the potential impact of acquiring the 1,471 farms, we need a careful analysis of the relationship between farm numbers and land area. As is to be expected in a country with extremely unequal landholding structures, a handful of very large farms dominate the distribution of land ownership. Among the farms gazetted for acquisition, a mere nine farms accounted for a full 23 per cent of the total land area to be acquired. They range in size from 30,000 to 350,000 hectares. The 29 biggest farms together accounted for 1.3 million hectares (33 per cent) of the total. Conversely, as many as 990 of the smallest farms, ranging in size from one to 1,499 hectares, accounted for only 20 per cent of the total area identified for acquisition. Thus, as can be seen in Figure 1, a few large farms accounted for the bulk of the identified area.

As explored further below, the bulk of the large farms targeted for acquisition are in

43 S. Moyo, 'Land Acquisition will not Lower Productivity', *The Mirror*, 1, 7, 19–25 January 1998.

44 According to von Blackenburg, *Large Commercial Farmers and Land Reform in Africa*, the LSCF sector has been the most successful sector in adapting to shocks of weather and shifting land uses.

45 Zimbabwe is divided into five agro-ecological zones, called Natural Regions, on the basis of climate, soils, rainfall, vegetation, temperature, geology and vegetation. Land use planning in Zimbabwe has, since colonial times, been based on such land classifications, although the availability of infrastructure (roads, towns, dams and energy) across Zimbabwe and other factors remain influential in actual land use patterns.

46 FAO, *The State of Irrigation in Africa* (Rome, 1990).

47 Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe – 1997/8*.

48 Moyo, *The Impact of Structural Adjustment on Land Uses in Zimbabwe*.

49 *Ibid.*

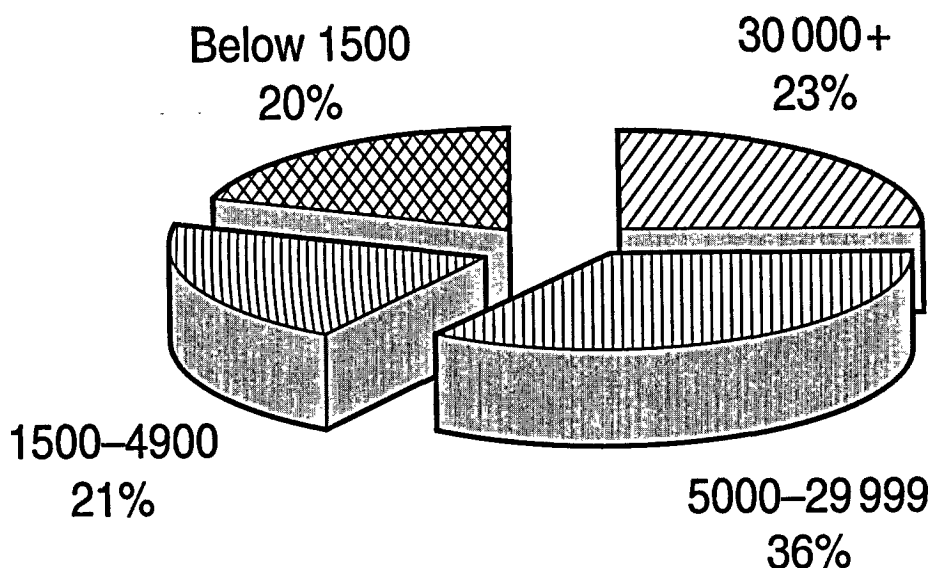


Figure 1. Farms identified by land area (hectares). Source: S. Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe – 1997/8: Socio-Economic and Political Impacts* (Harare, 1998), p. 16.

relatively less-cropped natural regions. Evidence of extreme land under-use among the largest farms in the LSCF sector, especially those located outside the Mashonaland and Manicaland provinces,<sup>50</sup> suggests that crop production losses amongst the bulk of farmlands gazetted would be minimal. This suggests among other things that the pace of land acquisition could be speeded and the cost reduced if larger farms were targeted first. Indeed, as we saw during the 1980s when over three million hectares were acquired from the LSCF, output among LSCF farmers increased in volume and value terms. Land redistribution does not necessarily lead to production losses.

### *Agro-ecological Potential and Features*

The quality of land acquired in terms of its agro-ecological Natural Region is a crucial measure of the land policy's efficacy. The agro-ecological potential of the identified land is a key variable in determining the potential of resettlement or tenant schemes as well as in terms of gauging the broad effects acquisition may have on current farm production levels. The state extension agency, Agritex, has recommended that Natural Regions IV and V be used mainly for livestock production and drought-resistant crops (where there is no large-scale irrigation). Natural Region III is said to be suitable mainly for livestock and cash crops such as maize, tobacco and cotton. Indeed aggregate data on output in the LSCF sector by Natural Region suggests that most of the ten main commercial crops is produced in Natural Regions I and II, and that Natural Regions IV and V produce mainly beef and wildlife products.

The extent to which the broad pattern of Natural Regions defines LSCF production reflects the technological backwardness of the sector in general. Irrigation and greenhouses,

50 We know that only about 30 per cent of arable land (700,000 hectares) is cropped on average each year and that most of this is in Natural Regions I to III. See Weiner *et al.*, 'Land Use and Agricultural Productivity in Zimbabwe'; Moyo, 'The Land Question in Zimbabwe', in Mandaza (ed); Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe*; M. Roth, *Analysis of Agrarian Structure and Land Use Patterns in Zimbabwe. A Background Paper for the Zimbabwe Agriculture Sector Memorandum for the World Bank* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1992).

Table 1. Natural regions and targeted farms

Natural region	Area extent (ha)	% Area	Farm count	% Farm
I	43,410	1.09	65	4.42
II	750,957	18.84	639	43.44
III	700,351	17.57	380	25.83
IV	1,140,536	28.61	224	15.23
V	1,351,690	33.91	163	11.08
Total	3,986,944	100.00	1,471	100.00

Source: S. Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe – 1997/8: Socio-Economic and Political Impacts* (Harare, 1998), p. 64.

for example, are highly concentrated among a few LSCF farmers, as pointed out earlier. Dams are not movable assets that can be set up on a farm in any geographic or agro-ecological region. Hence, there is less high-value cropping in Regions IV and V, except among the huge multinational and state estates located in southernmost Zimbabwe. These irrigated lands were not targeted for acquisition. Our evidence shows that over 62 per cent – 2.5 million hectares – of the identified land was located in Natural Regions IV and V; up to 80 per cent was located in Natural Regions III to V. Only about 704 of the identified farms were in the high rainfall Natural Regions I and II (see Table 1). These amounted to less than twenty per cent of the area identified. It is these farms which need to be examined closely as their high potential, assuming it was being used, could be lost through acquisition *per se*, before we look at resettlement output potential. The identified land is thus not the most productive land, and nor is it the land on which Zimbabwe's current agricultural production levels depend.

### *Land Tenure and Ownership*

The identified farms fell into six land ownership categories: individual or family farms; company farms; mining companies' land; church farmlands; NGO farmlands (including trusteeships, associations, etc.), and state lands (see Table 2). Company ownership dominated, accounting for 59 per cent of the farms in number and 72 per cent of the area identified. Individual ownership came second, accounting for 39 per cent of the farms in number and about 24 per cent of the area identified. No government (Rural Lands Department) owned leasehold farms were identified, as the government considers such land as already available for redistribution or reallocation, especially to indigenous commercial farmers in its tenant farmer schemes.<sup>51</sup> Church and NGO farms made up only 1.6 per cent of the farms, although some of these hold farms in company form and name. Amongst the companies, 21 farms (thirteen per cent of the land area identified) were owned by multinationals. Two government parastatals, the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) and the Cold Storage Company (CSC), had amongst them six farms amounting to 91,002 hectares. The nature of the multinational forms of ownership is discussed further below.

### *Multiple Farm Ownership*

Multiple ownership of farms can be used as a rough indicator of poor farm management and

51 Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe – 1997/8*; Interview with officials in the Ministry of Land and Agriculture, Harare, 16 February 1998.

Table 2. Ownership type by area in hectares

Ownership type	Farm count	% of <i>n</i> = 1,471	Area (ha)	Total area (%)
Individual	572	38.89	951,175	23.86
Company	870	59.14	2,881,991	72.29
State lands	7	0.48	97,828	2.45
Church farmlands	2	0.14	2,203	0.06
NGO farmlands (trustees)	20	1.36	53,747	1.35
Total	1,471	100.00	3,986,944	100.00

Source: S. Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe – 1997/8: Socio-Economic and Political Impacts* (Harare, 1998), p. 19.

land use inefficiency.<sup>52</sup> In Zimbabwe, there are extreme levels of land concentration through multiple farm ownership. This has tended to limit the effective use of land and efficient farm management due to failure to invest in both capital and human resources on the many dispersed farms owned by single individuals. Our data does not give a full indication of the extent of multiple farm ownership: it excludes a large number of multiply-owned farms belonging to owners who do not appear on the gazetted farm list, and it does not tell us about additional farms that the listed farmers own if those farms were not themselves listed.

Some of the key features of the identified multiply-owned farms are as follows. Three of the landholders owned a total of fifteen farms, ranging from two to ten farms each. These accounted for over 700,000 hectares.<sup>53</sup> The 72 owners who held between three and eleven farms each (a total of 305 farms) accounted for approximately 1.2 million hectares – a massive 30 per cent of the total identified area (see Figure 2). Multiply-owned farms of between 5,000 and 29,999 hectares accounted for 30 per cent of the number of farms identified, and up to 650,000 hectares in area. Instead of 1,471 different owners there were in fact only 1,103 owners, due to multiple ownership. About 177 owners had two to three farms each, while 34 owned over four farms each (see Table 3). The bulk of the multiply-owned farms are company-owned or belong to multinational firms while about ten indigenous farm owners owned more than one farm, totalling 34 farms and accounting for 836,188 hectares.

The land tenure evidence shows a diverse and differentiated structure of landholding and land use among Zimbabwe's white population. The debate on compulsory acquisition needs to be more nuanced in its assessment of the farms targeted for acquisition, rather than simply, and wrongly, referring to them as 'white farms'. On the one hand, we have a few white-dominated large companies – some of which are multinational companies with strong South African connections – which own the greater part of Zimbabwe's commercial farmlands, and which tend to under use land.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, we have a group of 1,000

52 Interview of Mr Tawonezwi, an Agritex official in the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture, Harare, March 1998. Many cases of multiply-owned farms under livestock were observed during fieldwork by the author, yet such land was deemed suitable for intensive cropping. These trends were also observed in the analysis of statistics from the Central Statistical Office, *Agricultural Production Survey* (Harare, 1994). Most of the multiply-owned farms were checked against the Intensive Conservation Area (ICA) output data. In addition, some of the farms were owned as mining claims, yet they were said by officials from the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture to be suitable for intensive crop production.

53 We identified the three biggest landholdings, then traced back the title holders to the other multiply held farms on the gazetted list.

54 See Weiner *et al.*, 'Land Use and Agricultural Productivity in Zimbabwe'; Moyo, 'The Land Question in Zimbabwe', in Mandaza (ed.) and Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe*; Roth, *Analysis of Agrarian Structure and Land use Patterns in Zimbabwe*; Moyo 'Land Acquisition: The Social and Political Context', *The Mirror*, 1, 8, 26 January–1 February 1998.

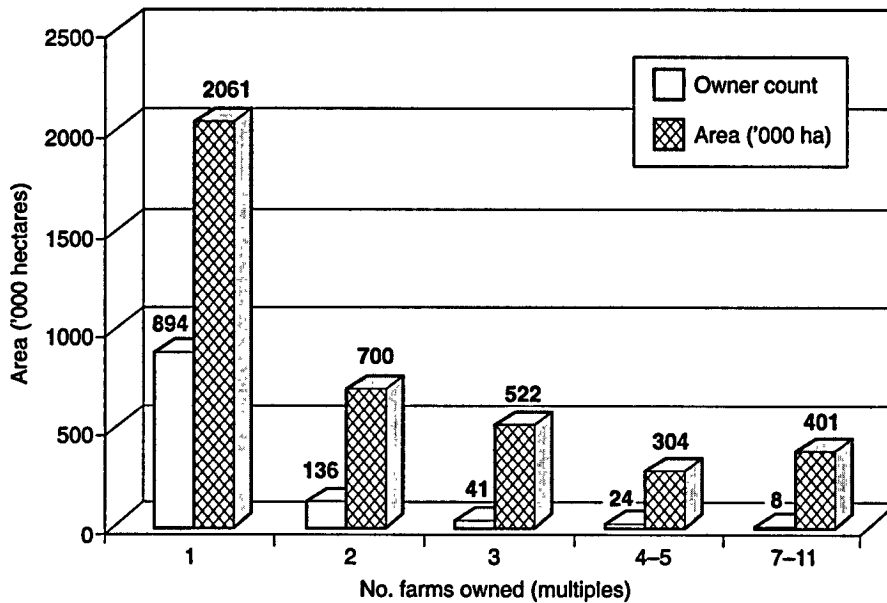


Figure 2. Number of multiply held titles by area and farm count.

white-owned family farms and family-based companies with relatively small farms, as well as a few large companies with relatively large farms that are used fairly well.

The pattern of land acquisition also suggests that future resettlement will be concentrated on land that is less well suited to rain-fed crop production. This means that government agricultural policy will need to promote heavy investment in irrigation on resettlement schemes. At the same time, it seems that the value of land in the drier Natural Regions IV and V has risen in response to improved markets for wildlife ranching and horticulture: 'traditional' values ascribed to land in terms of their agro-ecological potential are changing. It thus makes sense to proceed with land acquisition in these regions, where multiple ownership was previously ignored due to the fact that the supposedly harsh climatic conditions and the lack of water resources made resettlement less attractive. The mere fact that the prime lands cannot accommodate all the land hungry makes it sensible for the government to explore possibilities for investment in irrigation infrastructure as well as alternative land uses such as tourism in those regions.

Table 3. Number of multiple by owner count and total area

Multiple class	Farm count	Owner count	% of total area
1	894	894	51.69
2	272	136	17.55
3	123	41	13.08
4-6	115	24	7.2
7-11	67	8	10.5
Total	1,471	1,103	100.00

Source: S. Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe – 1997/8: Socio-Economic and Political Impacts* (Harare, 1998), p. 65.

Table 4. Provincial distribution of identified farms

Province	Total districts	Number of districts	Farm count	% of $n = 1,471$	Area (ha)	% of total area	1980–1996/7 acquisition (ha)	%
Masvingo	6	6	108	10.88	912,961	22.90	371,642	12.45
Mat. South	7	5	160	7.34	906,841	22.75	501,237	16.79
Midlands	7	6	203	13.80	746,320	18.72	556,130	18.63
Mash. West	6	4	399	27.12	508,463	12.75	478,241	16.02
Mash. East	10	7	297	20.19	338,765	8.50	237,841	7.97
Mat. North	6	5	69	4.69	312,434	7.84	225,925	7.57
Mash. Central	7	5	112	7.61	141,756	3.56	142,044	4.76
Manicaland	6	5	123	8.36	119,404	2.99	471,671	15.80
Total	55	43	1,471	100.00	3,960,800	100.00	2,984,731	100.00

Source: S. Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe – 1997/8: Socio-Economic and Political Impacts* (Harare, 1998), p. 23.

## The Social Implications of Land Transfer

Does the recent land identification exercise contribute to the stated social objectives of land reform? To answer this, we need to examine the identified land in terms of its location, its provincial distribution, the geography, race, gender, tenure, and nationality of the farmers, and wider political considerations. We need also to consider the social and political factors that would likely influence the nature of the land redistribution programme.

### The Geography of Acquisition

Land acquisition has to date focused on five of Zimbabwe's eight provinces. Between 1980 and 1996, most land was acquired in Midlands, Matabeleland South, Mashonaland West, Manicaland and Masvingo. In the recent land identification exercise, Masvingo and Matabeleland South predominated (each accounting for 22 per cent of the land identified). Mashonaland Central and East and Matabeleland North had the least land targeted for acquisition (see Table 4). Of the country's 57 Rural District Councils, 44 districts had land identified but only 25 accounted for 90 per cent of the total area identified. Just ten districts accounted for 63 per cent of the area identified. Unsurprisingly, districts with extensive LSCF areas and high levels of under-used land, such as Mwenezi, ranked at the top. Less predictably, prime lands with historically high levels of land under-use – such as Shamva and Hwedza – were spared extensive land acquisition (possibly due to the fact that these two districts have quite a few indigenous commercial farmers with posts in the ruling party).

One of the key criteria used to justify the listing of farms was their proximity to communal areas which faced severe land pressure and had high levels of landlessness.<sup>55</sup> While this bears on the cost efficiency of resettlement, the chief rationale for land reform accepted by most stakeholders has more to do with the principle of preventing the under-use of land. Proximity to communal areas is a problematic concept, since all commercial farms are brought closer to these areas once the farms between them and the nearest communal

55 According to L. Cliffe, 'Zimbabwe's Agricultural Success and Food Security', *Review of African Political Economy*, 43 (1988), originally this criterion was intended to reduce the costs of moving settlers, to expand the land available to local communities or provide 'elbow room', and avoid bringing in 'strangers'.



area are identified. Government officials recognize that this criterion poses a problem of shifting boundaries and can be used during one phase of land acquisition only.

The objective of creating 'elbow room' for communal area communities is nonetheless parochial and controversial since it implies discrimination and the exclusion of 'outsiders' from a particular area, district or province. Differential land acquisition patterns by district and province would mean that productive persons from some districts would never gain access to land. Similarly, undeserving persons in other districts might gain far easier access. Since about 46 per cent of the land area identified for purchase is less than 10 kilometres away from communal areas, the selection of settlers primarily from such areas would lead to an uneven allocation of land redistribution.

### *Zimbabwe's Landed Gentry*

Using the cut-off point of over 10,000 hectares, owned either through company or individual title and as single or multiple farms, 66 landowners were identified as 'landed gentry', and thus as crucial to negotiations for land transfer. These owned 158 farms, accounting for over two million hectares. A full 38 per cent of the area of these farms is in the shape of multiply-owned company farms. At least 18 directors associated with Anglo-American Corporation, for instance, own 18 farms under four companies, amounting to half a million hectares. Other companies which owned large tracts of land included: Zimasco, Lonrho, and the Development Trust of Zimbabwe (DTZ). Among those owning over 10,000 hectares, we found eight individuals among the targeted farms who together owned 13 farms occupying 158,531 hectares, of which 29 per cent of the area was owned as multiple farms. Multiple farm ownership is thus a decided feature of Zimbabwe's landed gentry, whether these are company or individually owned.

There were also black companies that held five farms of close to 17,000 hectares which featured in our area-based definition of the landed gentry. Casual observation suggests that there may be up to ten more black owners of over 10,000 hectares among those whose land was not designated. Otherwise, the one large black-owned estate is the three farms which make up Nuanetsi Ranches, owned by the DTZ Trust formerly led by the late Joshua Nkomo, three other living black and one white director. Many of the large company owners are very long established landed owners, involved mainly in the mining sector and other non-farming activities. Ten families – the Oppenheims, Meikles, Shaws, Skinners, Dyers, Guthries, Therons, Styles, Wheelers and Machipisas – are the most notable of Zimbabwe's landed gentry. Only twenty wholly owned black landholding companies were among those targeted for land acquisition, making up just two per cent of the company-owned land. More blacks own land under individual title.

### *Sex and the Distribution of Land Ownership*

Over 87 per cent of the registered landowners are male, while about 23 per cent of the farms were jointly owned and less than five per cent were owned outright by women. Less than 29 per cent of the directors of these farms were women. Overall, fewer black women (less than six per cent) owned the identified land in area terms compared to their white counterparts, who were mostly registered as joint husband and wife owners. Thus land transfer negotiations will mainly have to be held with white males who almost exclusively dominate the company directorships and individual titles of landholdings above 10,000 hectares in size. Patriarchal land tenure value systems among both the white and black community have consistently discriminated against women landowners. In principle there-

fore, more women need to be provided access to redistributed land in order to achieve a greater gender balance in land ownership, the agrarian structure and in society at large.

### *Absentee Landlords*

The evidence on the nationality of owners of identified farms is as yet inadequately quantified. However, there are many companies whose directors are registered foreigners. Most foreign owners appeared to be British and South African. This could explain the uncritical preoccupation of the press in these two countries with Zimbabwe's land reform programme.<sup>56</sup> Britain's current attitude to land reform is influenced by these interests. The extent to which foreign ownership was used as a criterion in land identification must await further analysis of the ownership data. Nationality can be a crude measure of 'absentee' ownership. In turn, absenteeism is often seen as a reflection of limited commitment to farming as absentee owners rely on farm managers supervised from afar.

In Zimbabwe, absenteeism has a particular significance because the local land tenure context differs from those countries where land redistribution amounted mainly to the withdrawal and reallocation of land property rights from landlords to those tenants who had been renting or using such lands. Here, absenteeism affirms the fact that a significant number of farm managers are actually blacks whose skills are not appropriately recognized. Black managers are often classified as 'supervisors' and 'semi-skilled' and receive lower wages than their jobs warrant.<sup>57</sup> But because about 40 per cent of farm management and technical skills are indigenous, according to survey evidence, it could be argued that since the LSCF sector is essentially black managed, the transfer of land ownership towards such farmers will not have negative effects. The question of absenteeism on indigenously owned LSCF and small scale commercial farms (SSCF) is contentious because there are different understandings of 'absence' and problems concerning the citizenship of land holders.<sup>58</sup> Many absentee black farmers are urban-based business people or professionals in the public and private sector. Critics argue that many white-owned company farms are similarly owned by people in urban areas.<sup>59</sup> Others argue that absenteeism is a relative concept and must be applied in a qualified manner.<sup>60</sup> Land owners who are resident in Zimbabwe, who hire farm managers, but regularly commute to communicate with them, or even the so-called 'telephone farmers', are considered by some not to be absent in essence. A broader application of absenteeism would include many of the 800 black LSCF farm holders, and therefore complicate the objectives of redressing the colonial, racial and nationality imbalances which underlie the land reform policy.

### *Race, Nationality and Indigenization*

Achieving an equitable balance in the racial and national nature of land ownership has been

56 Indeed, through dual citizenship, it is estimated that between 15,000 and 30,000 white Zimbabweans are British. See Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe*.

57 Government of Zimbabwe, *National Man Power Survey* (Ministry of Man Power Planning and Development, Harare, 1981).

58 Many white Zimbabweans have dual citizenship, mainly British and Zimbabwean. This is however not constitutionally permissible. In addition many absentees live in England and South Africa, and some face problems with immigration. The problem then is how to justify such white owners having perpetual rights to the most productive land when the majority of people are jammed in infertile communal lands.

59 H. Binswanger, 'The Political Implications of Alternative Models of Land Reform and Compensation', in J. Van Zyl, J. Kirsten and H. P. Binswanger (eds), *Agricultural Land Reform in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1996), suggests that owner-operated farms were more productive. Also see L. Sachikonye, 'State and Agribusiness in Zimbabwe: Structures and Procedures on Integration', ZIDS Discussion Paper No. 13 (Harare, 1991).

60 *Ibid.*

a key political objective of Zimbabwe's land reform programme. While the definition of who is 'indigenous' remains contentious, some members of minority groups who are Zimbabwean citizens by birth or through naturalization regard themselves as being indigenous, in contrast to foreign companies. But though they are Zimbabwean citizens, the limited social and political integration of most white LSCF owners renders them relatively isolated. This isolation tends to shape perceptions of them as non-indigenous persons. Just under 250 black indigenous LSCF owners, comprising about seventeen per cent of the listed owners, had their farms targeted by the provincial land identification committees. These were mainly smaller farms of less than 3,000 hectares. Together with the larger black-owned farms, they amounted to about twenty per cent of the total area identified. However, less than ten per cent of the total LSCF sector is owned by black indigenous persons. Thus, the indigenously-owned land identified for acquisition was disproportionately targeted.

The view now emerging within the government is that the acquisition of black-owned farms at this stage defeats the objective of indigenization. One unsubstantiated view, which seems exaggerated, is that many black-held LSCFs are underused and more of them should have been targeted.<sup>61</sup> Indeed there are some multiple-ownership farms held by blacks which are reported to have been spared by the identification exercise for unclear reasons, and some indigenously-owned farms may have deserved to be targeted because they are extremely large and comprise parts of huge estates. For instance, 26 farms owned by just six companies that had black directors or owners comprised about 1.3 million hectares, or 33 per cent of the land identified for acquisition. Three of these farms, amounting to 317,000 hectares, were owned in trust by DTZ. DTZ purports to promote indigenous development in general, but the extent to which the majority of Zimbabweans have benefited from such ventures has not been demonstrated. The evidence suggests that many of the black directors may be minority shareholders in these companies. The transfer of such oversized estates would thus not be inconsistent with the indigenization objectives of Zimbabwe's land policy.

### *Ethno-Regionalism and Land Reform*

It is puzzling that about 100 small farms located in Natural Regions II and III and owned by indigenous persons should be targeted, since these have the potential to be used productively and reflect a desirable move towards medium-scale farms. Ethnic discrimination and the machinations of elite leaders in the Mashonaland Provinces seem to have influenced this otherwise enigmatic outcome.<sup>62</sup> The growing discourses around excluding 'strangers' and resettling people near their own communal areas reflects the influence of ethno-regionalism in Zimbabwe's land policy. Some people believe that the manner in which certain indigenously-owned farms were listed for acquisition reflected such considerations. They expect that certain people who are considered not to 'belong' to a particular province may be excluded from prime lands there. However, still others believe that the land acquired may have targeted large indigenous farmers rather than the needy, poor and economically efficient small farmers.<sup>63</sup>

The manner in which certain elites, such as those working in government, some

61 'Ten Under-used Farms Repossessed in Mt Darwin', *The Herald*, 1 February 1999. N. Moyo and D. Mugabe agreed that some indigenous farms were underused, but this has to be understood in the context of neglect of the indigenous commercial farming sector by government. See 'Don't Designate Farms Belonging to Blacks', *The Herald*, 19 December 1997. The author notes that a few of the blacks who own multiple farms were spared from acquisition, but the reasons for this are not formally known.

62 Interviews with various government officials and politicians in Harare, February to June 1998.

63 *Ibid.*

ex-combatants and other key ruling party supporters, will gain access to land, in what proportion and at what cost to them, is a matter of widespread public conjecture and speculation. Public fears of discrimination and exclusive tendencies in land redistribution and the wider indigenization policy process have tended to undermine the credibility of the decision-makers in charge of land reform. Suggestions of corrupt practices in elite land schemes in the past are now aimed at the land reform programme as a whole.<sup>64</sup>

### Land Acquisition Strategy and Constraints

To date only 3.3 million of the promised 8.3 million hectares have been acquired by government for resettlement. This is due to a variety of constraints on land acquisition such as limited finance, and the poor quality and limited quantity of land on the market under the willing-seller system. In addition, land sold in very small parcels proved expensive to develop for resettlement. The fourteenth constitutional amendment and the Land Acquisition Act of 1992 were intended to speed up the land redistribution programme through compulsory land acquisition. However, the legal requirements of fairness, timeliness and transparency in the land acquisition process have made it cumbersome and expensive.<sup>65</sup> Faced with both increased fiscal constraints and growing unemployment during the 1990s, the government has been under pressure to expand land acquisition for redistribution and to resolve this long-standing issue once and for all.

However, while the overall economic and social impacts of such acquisition, as argued above, would mostly be benign, a variety of pressures were brought to bear upon the government to compromise its mass land acquisition programme of 1997. The government thus engaged with various stakeholders, including the three farmers' unions, NGOs and donors, to develop a more clearly specified and transparent phased programme for land acquisition and redistribution. The consultative process began in March 1998 when the National Economic Consultative Forum set up the Land Task Force.<sup>66</sup> Stakeholders and donors drew up position papers, developed and agreed to the Land Reform Resettlement Phase 2 (LRRP-2), and presented these at the September 1998 Donors' Conference on Land in Harare. Committees composed of a broad spectrum of groups, including government, met regularly to consider alternative ways of securing land for the LRRP. This culminated in a compromise at the Donors' Conference to start the LRRP-2 with an 'Inception Phase' as a learning process for 24 months. The Inception Phase was aimed at redistributing one million hectares through the existing, but dynamically improving, donor-assisted and market-based government approach to implementing the LRRP-2, as well as testing alternative approaches to land redistribution.<sup>67</sup>

Government policy on compulsory land acquisition was elaborated in this light in keeping with the Land Acquisition Act (Chapter 20:05).<sup>68</sup> The policy clarified the acqui-

64 *Ibid.*

65 Interviews with Inter-Ministerial Committee on Resettlement and Development (IMCRD) officials and other government officials, Harare, October 1998.

66 The NECF is a non-statutory body composed of civil society, academics, government and other stakeholders set up to solve the macro-economic problems of Zimbabwe. It has various task forces on, for example, Price and Incomes, Indigenization, Land Reform and Resettlement, Year 2000 Compliance and so forth. Task forces are established to work with key ministries and stakeholders on a technical basis. These include the Land Task Force which is currently looking at the Inception Phase of the LRRP-2 in close liaison with the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture, and other non-state actors.

67 See Government of Zimbabwe, *Draft Inception Phase Framework Plan of the Land Reform and Resettlement Phase 2*.

68 Government of Zimbabwe, *Land Reform and Resettlement Programme Phase II: A Policy Framework and Project Document* (Harare, September 1998).

sition process as follows. The identified land is to be checked at the Deeds Registry to rid it of possible inaccuracies in relation to ownership status, property description, location and size. The government must publish its intention to compulsorily acquire the land in the *Government Gazette* and the media. Publication is intended to give landowners the opportunity to submit any objections or representations relating to both the legality of the acquisition and also the extent to which the land to be acquired qualifies under the land identification criteria set by government. Landowners with valid plans to develop or invest in their land, including those approved by the Zimbabwe Investment Centre, can have their objections considered on this ground. The Government can de-list identified land that does not fall into any of its administratively established criteria. However, matters raised in the objections of a legal nature are referred to the Administrative Court for determination.

### *The De-listing of Gazetted Farms*

The process of de-listing farms that have been identified for compulsory acquisition is enshrined in the Land Acquisition Act of 1992. Our analysis of the breakdown of reasons for the de-listing of 625 farms reveals a variety of reasons, which have been given by the government through the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture. Many of the reasons for de-listing rely on the government's wider land and economic development policy positions, rather than the application of procedures and criteria related to the land acquisition policy.

The main reason given by government for de-listing farms was the need to conform to or adapt land acquisition policy to the objectives of the broader government land tenure policy. That policy aims to uphold the general principle of 'one man, one farm', whereby the commercial land ownership or tenure rights of each Zimbabwean who already holds land (hopefully including women, despite the terminology) are protected if they only hold one reasonably-sized farm. This means that as much as 69 per cent of the identified farms may have been identified mistakenly because they were wrongly thought to be multiply-owned or due to problems with the existing land records. Similarly, the wider tenure policy seeks to promote black commercial farm ownership – a goal contrary to the attempt to acquire over 134 of their farms. The bulk of what can be described as 'wrongly identified' farms may be explained by errors of judgement and identity (e.g. where ownership records were not accurate or up to date) arising from the work of the land identification committees responsible for identifying the land on the ground. It may also suggest that central government has a different perspective on 'one person, one farm' and indigenous ownership principles than the local committees. For example, some local committees felt that blacks who did not originate from the province were open 'prey' for land acquisition, while central officials thought otherwise.<sup>69</sup>

A total of 430 farms were de-listed on the grounds that titleholders owned only one farm. There were 894 single farm titleholders on the original acquisition list, so de-listings on this basis accounted for 48 per cent of singly-owned farms. However, some of the farms de-listed for this reason are apparently still being checked so as to verify that the owners truly have only one farm. In addition, about 109 farms were de-listed because they were held by indigenous (black) owners. This figure accounts for 82 per cent of the originally listed farms under black titleholders. A third issue concerned the productivity of the listed farms. Many analysts feared the consequences of acquiring productive farms, especially those on which investments were committed and promising. They believed that such land

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69 Interviews with government officials, farmers, and NGO personnel in Harare, Mashonaland, Bulawayo and Beitbridge, December 1997 to February 1998.

acquisitions contradicted government policy on attracting private investment, and so the farms should be de-listed.<sup>70</sup> This reason for de-listing did not prove a major consideration. A few such cases of de-listing occurred, including established and new plantations (coffee, tea, timber), mining and tourism projects. But only 50 farms covering 179,085 hectares fell into this de-listing category, and over 55 per cent of this land was held by parastatals. While this issue has attracted much criticism, the privately-owned area of such land affected by the identification process was in fact relatively small.

A fourth reason given for de-listing farms is to protect and promote the wider development contributions that the farms offered. A few farms were de-listed following the pleas of local officials who argued that they offered jobs and services. (The way in which this criterion is being applied is, however, being questioned by government officials.) Other farms included in this category are certain NGO projects and trusts. The large DTZ holdings, which account for about nineteen per cent of the de-listed land, dominated this category, despite the fact that the developmental role of DTZ is widely questioned by the public. This large area, combined with the de-listed government farms, amounts to a full 25 per cent of the de-listed area, suggesting that a fairly large proportion in area of the 1,471 farms affected by the land identification process were indeed public assets rather than private sector investments. But removing such public lands from the redistribution agenda, at least in the medium term, remains a contentious policy issue.

The final reason given by the government for de-listing farms is of a social nature. Churches and social clubs are significant landowners in Zimbabwe and it has been ruled that their social benefits should not be undermined by the land acquisition process. Only four farms were affected in this case. A final few farms were de-listed because they were double counted due to the inadequate registration of their consolidation into single units, and such considerations may affect still others.

When we examine the evidence altogether, it appears that a massive 42 per cent of the original 1,471 farms was de-listed (see Table 5). Most of these were below 1,500 hectares in size, the purported threshold size for viability in Natural Regions I and II. All seven originally identified government parastatal farms (Cold Storage Company, National Railways of Zimbabwe) were de-listed. The two NGO farms (owned by Danish Development Aid People to People) and all but one of the identified church farmlands were also de-listed. Farms owned by two multinational companies, namely Anglo-American Corporation Limited (Border Timbers Limited) and Lonrho (Willoughby's Consolidated) and some mining concerns (ZMDC, Anglo's Trojan Nickel Mine and Falcon Gold Zimbabwe, and Monomotapa Minerals) also featured in the de-listing. Of the 210 multiple farm titleholders originally identified for acquisition, 54 had some or all of their farms de-listed. It was company-held farms which featured most in the de-listing.

Of the original identification list, 847 farms remain after the de-listing exercise. These farms accounted for 58 per cent of the originally identified 3.98 million hectares. Two multinational farms, Anglo-American Corporation and Lonrho, accounted for fifteen of the farms or about twenty per cent of the remaining area. Another 351 farms are held by single titleholders, and accounted for 40 per cent of the remaining area. As expected, with race being a major reason for de-listing, black titleholders made up only 2.2 per cent of remaining farms. Almost 90 per cent of remaining land is owned by whites.

Subsequent to this round of de-listing, 500 of the 847 farms that remained on the list were struck off by the administrative court in early 1999. The legal procedures required in the compulsory acquisition process were so cumbersome and time-bound that the authorities

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

Table 5. Cases of de-listing

Reason	No. cases	%	Area de-listed	% area de-listed	% Area Identified
1. Land tenure					
(i) One farm only	430	69.00	924,093	55.81	23.18
(ii) Indigenous ownership	106	16.80	137,811	8.32	3.46
2. Investment policy					
(i) Approved investments	43	7.00	81,257	5.00	2.04
(ii) Government agency	7	1.10	97,828	5.91	2.45
3. Wider development policy					
(i) Socio-economic/political	11	1.76	34,165	2.06	0.86
(ii) NGO/Trusts projects	6	0.96	319,771	19.31	8.02
(iii) Training institutes	2	0.30	2,464	0.15	0.06
4. Social policy					
(Country clubs, church)	4	0.60	2,584	0.15	0.06
5. Identification problems					
(Consolidated, under investigation)	15	2.56	55,842	3.37	1.40
Total	625	100.00	1,655,815	100.00	41.47

Source: S. Moyo, *The Land Acquisition Process in Zimbabwe – 1997/8: Socio-Economic and Political Impacts* (Harare, 1998), p. 44.

could not cope. Indeed some government officials and World Bank personnel argue that processing so many farms at one go makes compulsory acquisition more expensive than the market approach.<sup>71</sup> This has frustrated some elements of the ruling party, while others saw an opportunity to further slow down a process they felt was out of control.<sup>72</sup> This is not, however, likely to stop pressure for land: as argued earlier, delays in implementing land redistribution due to legal or financial constraints to acquisition have tended to fuel land occupation strategies led by either community leaders or politicians and pressure groups.

## Moving Forward with Land Reform Policy-making

The land reform programme can achieve its desired social, economic and political objectives if the land acquisition exercise is strategically planned. The major challenge for the current land policy is to improve the credibility and efficacy of the government's approach to land reform. A key obstacle to this is the government's tendency to rationalize land acquisition and redistribution on the basis of historical grievances and political demands (which in their own right are legitimate), and not on the basis of valid economic and technical reasons for land reform. Private lobbyists used the media effectively to stress ideology and politics rather than economic rationality in the land acquisition policy. Indeed, some government statements on land acquisition tended to imply that there is *no* sound economic logic underlying the land acquisition policy, and that land redistribution using compulsory land acquisition methods is merely politically motivated.

As we have argued, the majority of farms identified in 1997 were oversized, under-used and largely located in a few of the less productive agro-ecological zones. The systematic acquisition of such land beginning with a few very large farms owned by absentee, multiple-owners, many of whom are foreign and multinationals, makes economic

71 Interviews of government officials and World Bank officials, Harare, October 1998.

72 *Ibid*, and interviews with CFU Officials, Harare, October 1998.

sense, even if political pressure against such action is high. Confusing the policy objectives by listing black and some productively used farms especially in the Mashonaland regions, as well as the errors of record and judgement that were made, distracted attention from the rationality of the land acquisition programme. Fears of production losses were clearly ideologically founded.

Throughout the mid-1997 to 1998 period of compulsory land acquisition, the government publicly appeared not to be providing room for negotiation, when in fact negotiations and trade-offs with stakeholders had long been underway. This alienated the less informed international community and important segments of the Zimbabwean middle class public. Recent offers of land for redistribution by commercial farmers testifies to an evolving dialogue which needs to be strengthened.<sup>73</sup> Because of the poor supply of information from government and private sector stakeholders alike, rumour and subjective interest rather than facts have led land policy discourses. The credibility of land reform was affected by the absence of a transparent plan and policy dialogue process, both of which are necessary to counteract attempts to sensationalize the costs and benefits of land acquisition.

The Inception Phase Framework Plan (IPFP) of 1999 is a product of the process of negotiation, and is now being used to implement government resettlement models and to test out a variety of complementary approaches to land redistribution with the key objective of 'learning by doing'. During this phase, the government aims to finalize a new land policy, which will introduce an agricultural land tax, streamline subdivision regulations, and improve land tenure arrangements. The IPFP is conceptually founded on a 'twin-track' approach that expects harmonious collaboration between government and non-state actors. The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Resettlement and Rural Development, supported by the recently established Technical Support Unit, co-ordinates the work of various line ministries, departments and Rural District Councils, as well as stakeholder organizations and private or NGO agencies involved in the LRRP. The Inception Phase will be financed by government and donors through the direct disbursement of funds to implementing agencies in and outside of government. The framework plan promises to improve the existing government land acquisition and resettlement approaches and allows non-state actors to try out new approaches to land acquisition and to selecting settlers, procuring finance and planning infrastructure for the resettlement programme.

Inequitable access to land resources and the underlying imbalances in the income distribution structure of the Zimbabwean economy continue to undermine the growth of rural incomes and to restrict the expansion of domestic markets and industrial development. Most Zimbabweans continue to depend on land for their survival because of slow industrialization, growing poverty and unemployment. The land reform programme must enhance economic expansion and diversification through expanding production on a more efficient and rational structure of farm sizes. The transfer of land should however not be limited to the off-loading of under-used and marginal lands to the poor and small farmers, either by the government or large farmers, as a means of extracting new forms of financial and political capital. The issue is to evolve a comprehensive socio-economic development strategy in which land reform is central.

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73 CFU, *Land Reform Proposal* (Harare, 1998).